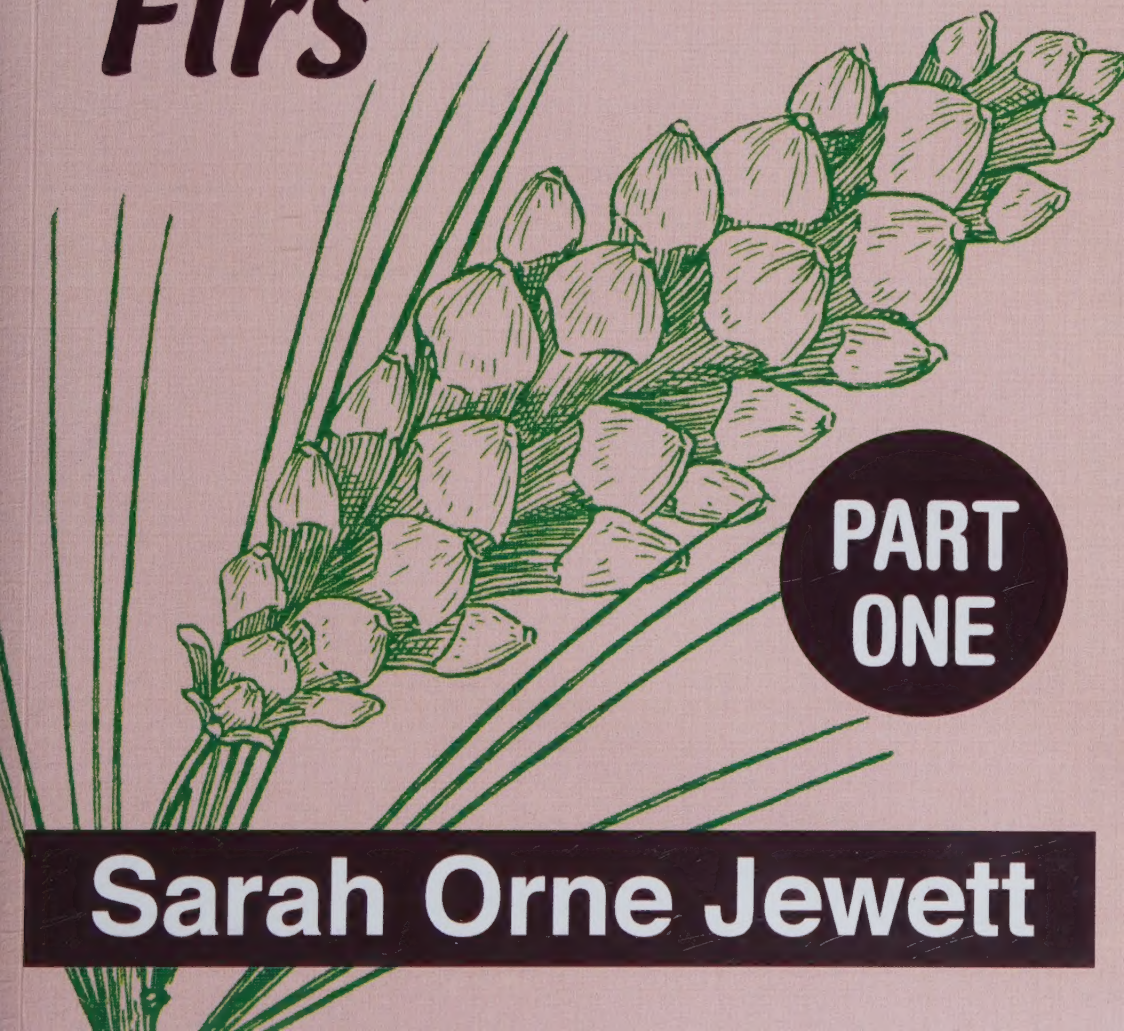


# *The Country of the Pointed Firs*



**PART  
ONE**

**Sarah Orne Jewett**



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# **THE COUNTRY OF THE POINTED FIRS**

**CHAPTERS 1-12**

**Sarah Orne  
Jewett**

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**VOLUME 1 of 2**







# I. THE RETURN

There was something about the coast town of Dunnet which made it seem more attractive than other maritime villages of eastern Maine. Perhaps it was the simple fact of acquaintance with that neighborhood which made it so attaching, and gave

such interest to  
the rocky shore  
and dark woods,  
and the few houses  
which seemed to  
be securely wedged  
and tree-nailed in  
among the ledges  
by the Landing.

These houses made  
the most of their  
seaward view, and  
there was a gayety  
and determined  
floweriness in  
their bits of

**garden ground; the  
small-paned high  
windows in the peaks  
of their steep gables  
were like knowing  
eyes that watched  
the harbor and the  
far sea-line beyond,  
or looked northward  
all along the shore  
and its background  
of spruces and  
balsam firs. When  
one really knows a  
village like this and  
its surroundings,**



it is like becoming acquainted with a single person. The process of falling in love at first sight is as final as it is swift in such a case, but the growth of true friendship may be a lifelong affair.

After a first brief visit made two or three summers before in the course of a yachting cruise,

a lover of Dunnet  
Landing returned to  
find the unchanged  
shores of the  
pointed firs, the  
same quaintness  
of the village  
with its elaborate  
conventionalities;  
all that mixture of  
remoteness, and  
childish certainty of  
being the centre of  
civilization of which  
her affectionate  
dreams had told.

One evening in June,  
a single passenger  
landed upon the  
steamboat wharf.  
The tide was high,  
there was a fine  
crowd of spectators,  
and the younger  
portion of the  
company followed  
her with subdued  
excitement up the  
narrow street of the  
salt-aired, white-  
clapboarded little  
town.



## II.

### MRS. TODD

Later, there was only one fault to find with this choice of a summer lodging-place, and that was its complete lack of seclusion. At first the tiny house of Mrs. Almira Todd, which stood with its end to the street, appeared to be retired and sheltered enough

from the busy world,  
behind its bushy bit  
of a green garden,  
in which all the  
blooming things,  
two or three gay  
hollyhocks and  
some London-pride,  
were pushed back  
against the gray-  
shingled wall. It was  
a queer little garden  
and puzzling to a  
stranger, the few  
flowers being put at  
a disadvantage by

so much greenery;  
but the discovery  
was soon made that  
Mrs. Todd was an  
ardent lover of herbs,  
both wild and tame,  
and the sea-breezes  
blew into the low  
end-window of the  
house laden with not  
only sweet-brier and  
sweet-mary, but balm  
and sage and borage  
and mint, wormwood  
and southernwood.  
If Mrs. Todd had



occasion to step into the far corner of her herb plot, she trod heavily upon thyme, and made its fragrant presence known with all the rest.

Being a very large person, her full skirts brushed and bent almost every slender stalk that her feet missed. You could always tell when she was stepping about there, even when

you were half awake in the morning, and learned to know, in the course of a few weeks' experience, in exactly which corner of the garden she might be.

At one side of this herb plot were other growths of a rustic pharmacopoeia, great treasures and rarities among the commoner herbs. There were

some strange and pungent odors that roused a dim sense and remembrance of something in the forgotten past. Some of these might once have belonged to sacred and mystic rites, and have had some occult knowledge handed with them down the centuries; but now they pertained only to humble compounds



brewed at intervals with molasses or vinegar or spirits in a small caldron on Mrs. Todd's kitchen stove. They were dispensed to suffering neighbors, who usually came at night as if by stealth, bringing their own ancient-looking vials to be filled. One nostrum was called the Indian remedy, and its price was but

fifteen cents; the  
whispered directions  
could be heard as  
customers passed  
the windows. With  
most remedies  
the purchaser was  
allowed to depart  
unadmonished from  
the kitchen, Mrs.  
Todd being a wise  
saver of steps; but  
with certain vials  
she gave cautions,  
standing in the  
doorway, and there

were other doses  
which had to be  
accompanied on  
their healing way  
as far as the gate,  
while she muttered  
long chapters of  
directions, and kept  
up an air of secrecy  
and importance to  
the last. It may not  
have been only the  
common aids of  
humanity with which  
she tried to cope; it  
seemed sometimes as

if love and hate and jealousy and adverse winds at sea might also find their proper remedies among the curious wild-looking plants in Mrs. Todd's garden.

The village doctor and this learned herbalist were upon the best of terms. The good man may have counted upon the



unfavorable effect of certain potions which he should find his opportunity in counteracting; at any rate, he now and then stopped and exchanged greetings with Mrs. Todd over the picket fence. The conversation became at once professional after the briefest preliminaries, and he would stand twirling a sweet-scented

sprig in his fingers,  
and make suggestive  
jokes, perhaps about  
her faith in a too  
persistent course of  
thoroughwort elixir,  
in which my landlady  
professed such firm  
belief as sometimes  
to endanger the life  
and usefulness of  
worthy neighbors.

To arrive at this  
quietest of seaside  
villages late in June,

when the busy herb-gathering season was just beginning, was also to arrive in the early prime of Mrs. Todd's activity in the brewing of old-fashioned spruce beer. This cooling and refreshing drink had been brought to wonderful perfection through a long series of experiments; it had won immense local fame, and

the supplies for its manufacture were always giving out and having to be replenished. For various reasons, the seclusion and uninterrupted days which had been looked forward to proved to be very rare in this otherwise delightful corner of the world. My hostess and I had made our shrewd



business agreement on the basis of a simple cold luncheon at noon, and liberal restitution in the matter of hot suppers, to provide for which the lodger might sometimes be seen hurrying down the road, late in the day, with cunner line in hand. It was soon found that this arrangement made large allowance for

**Mrs. Todd's slow herb-gathering progresses through woods and pastures. The spruce-beer customers were pretty steady in hot weather, and there were many demands for different soothing syrups and elixirs with which the unwise curiosity of my early residence had made me acquainted. Knowing**

**Mrs. Todd to be a widow, who had little beside this slender business and the income from one hungry lodger to maintain her, one's energies and even interest were quickly bestowed, until it became a matter of course that she should go afield**



every pleasant day,  
and that the lodger  
should answer all  
peremptory knocks  
at the side door.

In taking an  
occasional wisdom-  
giving stroll in Mrs.  
Todd's company, and  
in acting as business  
partner during her  
frequent absences,  
I found the July  
days fly fast, and it  
was not until I felt

myself confronted  
with too great pride  
and pleasure in the  
display, one night,  
of two dollars and  
twenty-seven cents  
which I had taken  
in during the day,  
that I remembered a  
long piece of writing,  
sadly belated now,  
which I was bound  
to do. To have been  
patted kindly on  
the shoulder and  
called "darlin'," to

have been offered  
a surprise of early  
mushrooms for  
supper, to have  
had all the glory of  
making two dollars  
and twenty-seven  
cents in a single  
day, and then to  
renounce it all and  
withdraw from these  
pleasant successes,  
needed much  
resolution. Literary  
employments are  
so vexed with



uncertainties at best, and it was not until the voice of conscience sounded louder in my ears than the sea on the nearest pebble beach that I said unkind words of withdrawal to Mrs. Todd. She only became more wistfully affectionate than ever in her expressions, and looked as disappointed as I

expected when I frankly told her that I could no longer enjoy the pleasure of what we called “seein’ folks.” I felt that I was cruel to a whole neighborhood in curtailing her liberty in this most important season for harvesting the different wild herbs that were so much counted upon to ease their winter ails.

**“Well, dear,” she said  
sorrowfully, “I’ve  
took great advantage  
o’ your bein’ here.  
I ain’t had such a  
season for years,  
but I have never had  
nobody I could so  
trust. All you lack  
is a few qualities,  
but with time you’d  
gain judgment an’**

experience, an' be very able in the business. I'd stand right here an' say it to anybody."

Mrs. Todd and I were not separated or estranged by the change in our business relations; on the contrary, a deeper intimacy seemed to begin. I do not know what herb of the night it was



that used sometimes to send out a penetrating odor late in the evening, after the dew had fallen, and the moon was high, and the cool air came up from the sea. Then Mrs. Todd would feel that she must talk to somebody, and I was only too glad to listen. We both fell under the spell, and she either stood

outside the window,  
or made an errand  
to my sitting-room,  
and told, it might be  
very commonplace  
news of the day, or,  
as happened one  
misty summer night,  
all that lay deepest  
in her heart. It was in  
this way that I came  
to know that she had  
loved one who was  
far above her.

**“No, dear, him I  
speak of could never  
think of me,” she  
said. “When we was  
young together his  
mother didn’t favor  
the match, an’ done  
everything she could  
to part us; and folks  
thought we both  
married well, but’t  
wa’n’t what either  
one of us wanted  
most; an’ now we’re  
left alone again, an’  
might have had each**

other all the time.  
He was above bein'  
a seafarin' man, an'  
prospered more than  
most; he come of  
a high family, an'  
my lot was plain  
an' hard-workin'. I  
ain't seen him for  
some years; he's  
forgot our youthful  
feelin's, I expect,  
but a woman's heart  
is different; them  
feelin's comes back  
when you think



you've done with  
'em, as sure as spring  
comes with the year.  
An' I've always had  
ways of hearin' about  
him."

She stood in the  
centre of a braided  
rug, and its rings  
of black and gray  
seemed to circle  
about her feet in the  
dim light. Her height  
and massiveness in  
the low room gave

her the look of a  
huge sibyl, while the  
strange fragrance  
of the mysterious  
herb blew in from the  
little garden.

### III.

## THE SCHOOLHOUSE

For some days  
after this, Mrs.  
Todd's customers  
came and went  
past my windows,  
and, haying-time  
being nearly over,  
strangers began  
to arrive from the  
inland country, such  
was her widespread  
reputation.  
Sometimes I saw

a pale young  
creature like a white  
windflower left over  
into midsummer,  
upon whose face  
consumption had  
set its bright and  
wistful mark; but  
oftener two stout,  
hard-worked women  
from the farms  
came together,  
and detailed their  
symptoms to Mrs.  
Todd in loud and  
cheerful voices,



combining the satisfactions of a friendly gossip with the medical opportunity. They seemed to give much from their own store of therapeutic learning. I became aware of the school in which my landlady had strengthened her natural gift; but hers was always the governing mind, and the final command,

“Take of hy’sop  
one handful” (or  
whatever herb it  
was), was received  
in respectful silence.  
One afternoon, when  
I had listened,—it  
was impossible  
not to listen, with  
cottonless ears,—  
and then laughed  
and listened again,  
with an idle pen in  
my hand, during a  
particularly spirited  
and personal

conversation, I reached for my hat, and, taking blotting-book and all under my arm, I resolutely fled further temptation, and walked out past the fragrant green garden and up the dusty road. The way went straight uphill, and presently I stopped and turned to look back.

The tide was in, the wide harbor was surrounded by its dark woods, and the small wooden houses stood as near as they could get to the landing. Mrs. Todd's was the last house on the way inland. The gray ledges of the rocky shore were well covered with sod in most places, and the pasture bayberry and wild roses grew



thick among them. I could see the higher inland country and the scattered farms. On the brink of the hill stood a little white schoolhouse, much wind-blown and weather-beaten, which was a landmark to seagoing folk; from its door there was a most beautiful view of sea and shore. The summer vacation

now prevailed, and after finding the door unfastened, and taking a long look through one of the seaward windows, and reflecting afterward for some time in a shady place near by among the bayberry bushes, I returned to the chief place of business in the village, and, to the amusement of two of the

selectmen, brothers  
and autocrats of  
Dunnet Landing, I  
hired the schoolhouse  
for the rest of the  
vacation for fifty  
cents a week.

Selfish as it may  
appear, the retired  
situation seemed  
to possess great  
advantages, and  
I spent many  
days there quite  
undisturbed, with the

sea-breeze blowing  
through the small,  
high windows and  
swaying the heavy  
outside shutters to  
and fro. I hung my  
hat and luncheon-  
basket on an entry  
nail as if I were a  
small scholar, but I  
sat at the teacher's  
desk as if I were that  
great authority, with  
all the timid empty  
benches in rows  
before me. Now and



then an idle sheep came and stood for a long time looking in at the door. At sundown I went back, feeling most businesslike, down toward the village again, and usually met the flavor, not of the herb garden, but of Mrs. Todd's hot supper, halfway up the hill. On the nights when there were evening

meetings or other public exercises that demanded her presence we had tea very early, and I was welcomed back as if from a long absence.

Once or twice I feigned excuses for staying at home, while Mrs. Todd made distant excursions, and came home late, with both hands full and a heavily laden

apron. This was in pennyroyal time, and when the rare lobelia was in its prime and the elecampane was coming on. One day she appeared at the schoolhouse itself, partly out of amused curiosity about my industries; but she explained that there was no tansy in the neighborhood with such snap to it as some that grew about

the schoolhouse lot.  
Being scuffed down  
all the spring made  
it grow so much the  
better, like some  
folks that had it  
hard in their youth,  
and were bound to  
make the most of  
themselves before  
they died.



# **IV. AT THE SCHOOLHOUSE WINDOW**

**One day I reached the schoolhouse very late, owing to attendance upon the funeral of an acquaintance and neighbor, with whose sad decline in health I had been familiar, and whose last days both the doctor and Mrs.**

Todd had tried in vain to ease. The services had taken place at one o'clock, and now, at quarter past two, I stood at the schoolhouse window, looking down at the procession as it went along the lower road close to the shore. It was a walking funeral, and even at that distance I could recognize most of the mourners as they

went their solemn way. Mrs. Begg had been very much respected, and there was a large company of friends following to her grave. She had been brought up on one of the neighboring farms, and each of the few times that I had seen her she professed great dissatisfaction with town life. The people lived too close

together for her liking, at the Landing, and she could not get used to the constant sound of the sea. She had lived to lament three seafaring husbands, and her house was decorated with West Indian curiosities, specimens of conch shells and fine coral which they had brought home from their voyages in lumber-laden ships.



Mrs. Todd had told me all our neighbor's history. They had been girls together, and, to use her own phrase, had "both seen trouble till they knew the best and worst on 't." I could see the sorrowful, large figure of Mrs. Todd as I stood at the window. She made a break in the procession by walking slowly and keeping

the after-part of it back. She held a handkerchief to her eyes, and I knew, with a pang of sympathy, that hers was not affected grief.

Beside her, after much difficulty, I recognized the one strange and unrelated person in all the company, an old man who

had always been mysterious to me. I could see his thin, bending figure. He wore a narrow, long-tailed coat and walked with a stick, and had the same "cant to leeward" as the wind-bent trees on the height above.

This was Captain Littlepage, whom I had seen only once or twice before, sitting

pale and old behind  
a closed window;  
never out of doors  
until now. Mrs. Todd  
always shook her  
head gravely when I  
asked a question, and  
said that he wasn't  
what he had been  
once, and seemed to  
class him with her  
other secrets. He  
might have belonged  
with a simple which  
grew in a certain  
slug-haunted corner



of the garden, whose  
use she could never  
be betrayed into  
telling me, though I  
saw her cutting the  
tops by moonlight  
once, as if it were  
a charm, and not  
a medicine, like  
the great fading  
bloodroot leaves.

I could see that she  
was trying to keep  
pace with the old  
captain's lighter

steps. He looked like an aged grasshopper of some strange human variety.

Behind this pair was a short, impatient, little person, who kept the captain's house, and gave it what Mrs. Todd and others believed to be no proper sort of care. She was usually called "that Mari' Harris" in subdued conversation between

intimates, but they treated her with anxious civility when they met her face to face.

The bay-sheltered islands and the great sea beyond stretched away to the far horizon southward and eastward; the little procession in the foreground looked futile and helpless on the edge

of the rocky shore. It was a glorious day early in July, with a clear, high sky; there were no clouds, there was no noise of the sea. The song sparrows sang and sang, as if with joyous knowledge of immortality, and contempt for those who could so pettily concern themselves with death. I stood watching until the



funeral procession  
had crept round  
a shoulder of the  
slope below and  
disappeared from the  
great landscape as  
if it had gone into a  
cave.

An hour later I was  
busy at my work.  
Now and then a bee  
blundered in and took  
me for an enemy;  
but there was a  
useful stick upon

the teacher's desk,  
and I rapped to call  
the bees to order as  
if they were unruly  
scholars, or waved  
them away from their  
riots over the ink,  
which I had bought  
at the Landing store,  
and discovered to  
be scented with  
bergamot, as if to  
refresh the labors  
of anxious scribes.  
One anxious scribe  
felt very dull that

day; a sheep-bell  
tinkled near by, and  
called her wandering  
wits after it. The  
sentences failed to  
catch these lovely  
summer cadences.  
For the first time  
I began to wish  
for a companion  
and for news from  
the outer world,  
which had been,  
half unconsciously,  
forgotten. Watching  
the funeral gave

one a sort of pain.  
I began to wonder  
if I ought not to  
have walked with  
the rest, instead of  
hurrying away at the  
end of the services.  
Perhaps the Sunday  
gown I had put on  
for the occasion  
was making this  
disastrous change  
of feeling, but I had



now made myself and my friends remember that I did not really belong to Dunnet Landing.

I sighed, and turned to the half-written page again.

## V.

### CAPTAIN LITTLEPAGE

It was a long time after this; an hour was very long in that coast town where nothing stole away the shortest minute. I had lost myself completely in work, when I heard footsteps outside. There was a steep footpath between the upper and the

lower road, which I climbed to shorten the way, as the children had taught me, but I believed that Mrs. Todd would find it inaccessible, unless she had occasion to seek me in great haste. I wrote on, feeling like a besieged miser of time, while the footsteps came nearer, and the sheep-bell tinkled

away in haste as if someone had shaken a stick in its wearer's face. Then I looked, and saw Captain Littlepage passing the nearest window; the next moment he tapped politely at the door.

"Come in, sir," I said, rising to meet him; and he entered, bowing with much courtesy. I stepped



down from the desk  
and offered him a  
chair by the window,  
where he seated  
himself at once,  
being sadly spent by  
his climb. I returned  
to my fixed seat  
behind the teacher's  
desk, which gave him  
the lower place of a  
scholar.

**“You ought to have the place of honor, Captain Littlepage,” I said.**

**“A happy, rural seat of various views,”**

**he quoted, as he gazed out into the sunshine and up the long wooded shore. Then he glanced at me, and looked all about him as pleased as a child.**

**“My quotation was from Paradise Lost: the greatest of poems, I suppose you know?” and I nodded.**

**“There’s nothing that ranks, to my mind, with Paradise Lost; it’s all lofty, all lofty,” he continued.**

**“Shakespeare was a great poet; he copied life, but you have to put up with a great deal of low talk.”**

I now remembered that Mrs. Todd had told me one day that Captain Littlepage had overset his mind with too much reading; she had also made dark reference to his having "spells" of some unexplainable nature. I could not help wondering what errand had brought him out in search of me. There

was something quite charming in his appearance: it was a face thin and delicate with refinement, but worn into appealing lines, as if he had suffered from loneliness and misapprehension. He looked, with his careful precision of dress, as if he were the object of cherishing care on the part of elderly



unmarried sisters,  
but I knew Mari'  
Harris to be a very  
common-place,  
inelegant person,  
who would have no  
such standards; it  
was plain that the  
captain was his own  
attentive valet. He  
sat looking at me  
expectantly. I could  
not help thinking  
that, with his queer  
head and length of  
thinness, he was

made to hop along the road of life rather than to walk. The captain was very grave indeed, and I bade my inward spirit keep close to discretion.

“Poor Mrs. Begg has gone,” I ventured to say. I still wore my Sunday gown by way of showing respect.

“She has gone,” said the captain,—“very

easy at the last, I was informed; she slipped away as if she were glad of the opportunity."

I thought of the Countess of Carberry, and felt that history repeated itself.

"She was one of the old stock," continued Captain Littlepage,

with touching sincerity. "She was very much looked up to in this town, and will be missed."

I wondered, as I looked at him, if he had sprung from a line of ministers; he had the refinement of look and air of command which are the heritage of the old ecclesiastical families of New

**England. But as Darwin says in his autobiography, “there is no such king as a sea-captain; he is greater even than a king or a schoolmaster!”**

**Captain Littlepage moved his chair out of the wake of the sunshine, and still**



sat looking at me.  
I began to be very  
eager to know upon  
what errand he had  
come.

"It may be found out  
some o' these days,"  
he said earnestly.

"We may know it all,  
the next step; where  
Mrs. Begg is now, for  
instance. Certainty,  
not conjecture, is  
what we all desire."

**“I suppose we shall know it all some day,” said I.**

**“We shall know it while yet below,” insisted the captain, with a flush of impatience on his thin cheeks. “We have not looked for truth in the right direction. I know what I speak of; those who have laughed at me little**

know how much  
reason my ideas  
are based upon."

He waved his hand  
toward the village  
below. "In that  
handful of houses  
they fancy that they  
comprehend the  
universe."

I smiled, and waited  
for him to go on.

"I am an old man,  
as you can see,"  
he continued,

**“and I have been a shipmaster the greater part of my life,—forty-three years in all. You may not think it, but I am above eighty years of age.”**

**He did not look so old, and I hastened to say so.**

**“You must have left the sea a good many years ago, then, Captain Littlepage?” I said.**

**“I should have been serviceable at least five or six years more,” he answered.**

**“My acquaintance with certain—my experience upon a certain occasion, I might say, gave rise to prejudice. I do not**



mind telling you that I chanced to learn of one of the greatest discoveries that man has ever made."

Now we were approaching dangerous ground, but a sudden sense of his sufferings at the hands of the ignorant came to my help, and I asked to hear more with all the deference I really

felt. A swallow flew into the schoolhouse at this moment as if a kingbird were after it, and beat itself against the walls for a minute, and escaped again to the open air; but Captain Littlepage took no notice whatever of the flurry.

"I had a valuable cargo of general merchandise from

the London docks to Fort Churchill, a station of the old company on Hudson's Bay," said the captain earnestly. "We were delayed in lading, and baffled by head winds and a heavy tumbling sea all the way north-about and across. Then the fog kept us off the coast; and when I made port at last, it was too late to delay in those

northern waters  
with such a vessel  
and such a crew as I  
had. They cared for  
nothing, and idled me  
into a fit of sickness;  
but my first mate  
was a good, excellent  
man, with no more  
idea of being frozen  
in there until spring  
than I had, so we  
made what speed we  
could to get clear of  
Hudson's Bay and off  
the coast. I owned

an eighth of the vessel, and he owned a sixteenth of her. She was a full-rigged ship, called the Minerva, but she was getting old and leaky. I meant it should be my last v'y'ge in her, and so it proved. She had been an excellent vessel in her day. Of the cowards aboard her I can't say so much."



**"Then you were wrecked?" I asked, as he made a long pause.**

**"I wa'n't caught astern o' the lighter by any fault of mine," said the captain gloomily. "We left Fort Churchill and run out into the Bay with a light pair o' heels; but I had been vexed to death with their red-tape rigging**

at the company's office, and chilled with stayin' on deck an' tryin' to hurry up things, and when we were well out o' sight o' land, headin' for Hudson's Straits, I had a bad turn o' some sort o' fever, and had to stay below. The days were getting short, and we

made good runs, all well on board but me, and the crew done their work by dint of hard driving."

I began to find this unexpected narrative a little dull. Captain Littlepage spoke with a kind of slow correctness that lacked the longshore high flavor to which I had grown used; but I listened respectfully

while he explained  
the winds having  
become contrary,  
and talked on in a  
dreary sort of way  
about his voyage,  
the bad weather, and  
the disadvantages  
he was under in  
the lightness of his  
ship, which bounced  
about like a chip in a

bucket, and would not answer the rudder or properly respond to the most careful setting of sails.

“So there we were blowin’ along anyways,” he complained; but looking at me at this moment, and seeing that my thoughts were unkindly wandering, he ceased to speak.



**"It was a hard life at sea in those days, I am sure," said I, with redoubled interest.**

**"It was a dog's life," said the poor old gentleman, quite reassured, "but it made men of those who followed it. I see a change for the worse even in our own town here; full of loafers now, small and poor as**

'tis, who once would  
have followed the  
sea, every lazy soul  
of 'em. There is no  
occupation so fit  
for just that class  
o' men who never  
get beyond the  
fo'cas'le. I view it,  
in addition, that a  
community narrows  
down and grows  
dreadful ignorant  
when it is shut up to  
its own affairs, and  
gets no knowledge

of the outside world except from a cheap, unprincipled newspaper. In the old days, a good part o' the best men here knew a hundred ports and something of the way folks lived in them. They saw the world for themselves, and like's not their wives and children saw it with them. They may not have had the

best of knowledge to carry with 'em sight-seein', but they were some acquainted with foreign lands an' their laws, an' could see outside the battle for town clerk here in Dunnet; they got some sense o' proportion. Yes, they lived more dignified, and their houses were better within an' without.

Shipping's a terrible loss to this part o' New England from a social point o' view, ma'am."

"I have thought of that myself," I returned, with my interest quite awakened. "It accounts for the



change in a great many things,—the sad disappearance of sea-captains,—doesn't it?"

"A shipmaster was apt to get the habit of reading," said my companion, brightening still more, and taking on a most touching air of unreserve. "A captain is not expected to be familiar with his crew,

and for company's  
sake in dull days  
and nights he turns  
to his book. Most of  
us old shipmasters  
came to know 'most  
everything about  
something; one would  
take to readin' on  
farming topics, and  
some were great  
on medicine,—but  
Lord help their poor  
crews!—or some  
were all for history,  
and now and then

there'd be one like  
me that gave his  
time to the poets. I  
was well acquainted  
with a shipmaster  
that was all for  
bees an' beekeepin';  
and if you met him  
in port and went  
aboard, he'd sit and  
talk a terrible while  
about their havin' so  
much information,  
and the money that  
could be made out of  
keepin' 'em. He was

one of the smartest  
captains that ever  
sailed the seas, but  
they used to call the  
Newcastle, a great  
bark he commanded  
for many years,  
Tuttle's beehive.  
There was old Cap'n  
Jameson: he had  
notions of Solomon's  
Temple, and made  
a very handsome  
little model of  
the same, right  
from the Scripture

measurements,  
same's other sailors  
make little ships and  
design new tricks of  
rigging and all that.  
No, there's nothing  
to take the place of  
shipping in a place  
like ours. These  
bicycles offend me  
dreadfully; they  
don't afford no real  
opportunities of  
experience such as  
a man gained on a  
voyage. No: when



folks left home in the old days they left it to some purpose, and when they got home they stayed there and had some pride in it. There's no large-minded way of thinking now: the worst have got to be best and rule everything; we're all turned upside down and going back year by year."

**“Oh no, Captain Littlepage, I hope not,” said I, trying to soothe his feelings.**

**There was a silence in the schoolhouse, but we could hear the noise of the water on a beach below. It sounded like the strange warning wave that gives notice of the turn of the tide. A late golden robin,**

**with the most joyful  
and eager of voices,  
was singing close by  
in a thicket of wild  
roses.**

## VI.

### THE WAITING PLACE

"How did you manage with the rest of that rough voyage on the Minerva?" I asked.

"I shall be glad to explain to you," said Captain Littlepage, forgetting his grievances for the moment. "If I had a map at hand I could explain better. We were driven to and

fro 'way up toward  
what we used to call  
Parry's Discoveries,  
and lost our bearings.  
It was thick and  
foggy, and at last  
I lost my ship; she  
drove on a rock,  
and we managed  
to get ashore on  
what I took to be a  
barren island, the  
few of us that were  
left alive. When  
she first struck, the  
sea was somewhat



calmer than it had been, and most of the crew, against orders, manned the long-boat and put off in a hurry, and were never heard of more. Our own boat upset, but the carpenter kept himself and me above water, and we drifted in. I had no strength to call upon after my recent fever, and laid down to die; but he found

the tracks of a man and dog the second day, and got along the shore to one of those far missionary stations that the Moravians support. They were very poor themselves, and in distress; 'twas a useless place. There were but few Esquimaux left in

that region. There we remained for some time, and I became acquainted with strange events."

The captain lifted his head and gave me a questioning glance. I could not help noticing that the dulled look in his

eyes had gone, and there was instead a clear intentness that made them seem dark and piercing.

“There was a supply ship expected, and the pastor, an excellent Christian man, made no doubt that we should get passage in her. He was hoping that orders would come to break up the station;

but everything was uncertain, and we got on the best we could for a while. We fished, and helped the people in other ways; there was no other way of paying our debts. I was taken to the pastor's house until I got better; but they were crowded, and I felt myself in the way, and made excuse to join with



an old seaman, a Scotchman, who had built him a warm cabin, and had room in it for another. He was looked upon with regard, and had stood by the pastor in some troubles with the people. He had been on one of those English exploring parties that found one end of the road to the north pole, but never could find

the other. We lived like dogs in a kennel, or so you'd thought if you had seen the hut from the outside; but the main thing was to keep warm; there were piles of bird-skins to lie on, and he'd made him a good bunk, and there was another for me. 'Twas dreadful dreary waitin' there; we begun to think the supply steamer

was lost, and my poor ship broke up and strewed herself all along the shore. We got to watching on the headlands; my men and me knew the people were short of supplies and had to pinch themselves. It ought to read in the Bible, 'Man cannot live by fish alone,' if they'd told the truth of things; 'taint bread

that wears the worst  
on you! First part of  
the time, old Gaffett,  
that I lived with,  
seemed speechless,  
and I didn't know  
what to make of him,  
nor he of me, I dare  
say; but as we got  
acquainted, I found  
he'd been through  
more disasters than I  
had, and had troubles  
that wa'n't going to  
let him live a great  
while. It used to ease

his mind to talk to an understanding person, so we used to sit and talk together all day, if it rained or blew so that we couldn't get out. I'd got a bad blow on the back of my head at the time we came ashore, and it pained me at times, and my strength was broken, anyway; I've never been so able since."



**Captain Littlepage  
fell into a reverie.**

**"Then I had the good  
of my reading," he  
explained presently.**

**"I had no books; the  
pastor spoke but  
little English, and  
all his books were  
foreign; but I used to  
say over all I could  
remember. The old  
poets little knew  
what comfort they  
could be to a man. I**

was well acquainted with the works of Milton, but up there it did seem to me as if Shakespeare was the king; he has his sea terms very accurate, and some beautiful passages were calming to the mind. I could say them over until I shed tears; there was

nothing beautiful to me in that place but the stars above and those passages of verse.

“Gaffett was always brooding and brooding, and talking to himself; he was afraid he should never get away, and it preyed upon his mind. He thought when I got home I could interest

the scientific men  
in his discovery: but  
they're all taken  
up with their own  
notions; some didn't  
even take pains to  
answer the letters I  
wrote. You observe  
that I said this  
crippled man Gaffett  
had been shipped  
on a voyage of  
discovery. I now tell  
you that the ship was  
lost on its return, and  
only Gaffett and two

officers were saved off the Greenland coast, and he had knowledge later that those men never got back to England; the brig they shipped on was run down in the night. So no other living soul had the facts, and he gave them to me. There is a strange sort of a country 'way up



north beyond the ice,  
and strange folks  
living in it. Gaffett  
believed it was the  
next world to this."

"What do you mean,  
Captain Littlepage?"  
I exclaimed. The  
old man was  
bending forward and  
whispering; he looked  
over his shoulder  
before he spoke the  
last sentence.

**"To hear old Gaffett tell about it was something awful," he said, going on with his story quite steadily after the moment of excitement had passed. "'Twas first a tale of dogs and sledges, and cold and wind and snow. Then they begun to find the ice grow rotten; they had been frozen in, and got into a**

current flowing north, far up beyond Fox Channel, and they took to their boats when the ship got crushed, and this warm current took them out of sight of the ice, and into a great open sea; and they still followed it due north, just the very way they had planned to go. Then they struck a coast that wasn't laid

down or charted, but the cliffs were such that no boat could land until they found a bay and struck across under sail to the other side where the shore looked lower; they were scant of provisions and out of water, but they got sight of something that looked like a great town. 'For God's sake, Gaffett!' said I,

the first time he told me. 'You don't mean a town two degrees farther north than ships had ever been?' for he'd got their course marked on an old chart that he'd pieced out at the top; but he insisted upon it, and told it over and over again, to be sure I had it straight to carry to those who would be interested. There



was no snow and ice, he said, after they had sailed some days with that warm current, which seemed to come right from under the ice that they'd been pinched up in and had been crossing on foot for weeks."

"But what about the town?" I asked. "Did they get to the town?"

**“They did,” said the captain, “and found inhabitants; ‘twas an awful condition of things. It appeared, as near as Gaffett could express it, like a place where there was neither living nor dead. They could see the place when they were approaching it by sea pretty near like any town, and thick with habitations; but**

all at once they lost sight of it altogether, and when they got close inshore they could see the shapes of folks, but they never could get near them,—all blowing gray figures that would pass along alone, or sometimes gathered in companies as if they were watching. The men were frightened at first, but the

shapes never came near them,—it was as if they blew back; and at last they all got bold and went ashore, and found birds' eggs and sea fowl, like any wild northern spot where creatures were tame and folks had never been, and there was good water. Gaffett said that he and another man came near one o'

the fog-shaped men  
that was going along  
slow with the look of  
a pack on his back,  
among the rocks,  
an' they chased him;  
but, Lord! he flittered  
away out o' sight like  
a leaf the wind takes  
with it, or a piece  
of cobweb. They  
would make as if  
they talked together,  
but there was no  
sound of voices,  
and 'they acted as



if they didn't see us, but only felt us coming towards them,' says Gaffett one day, trying to tell the particulars. They couldn't see the town when they were ashore. One day the captain and the doctor were gone till night up across the high land where the town had seemed to be, and they came back at night beat

out and white as  
ashes, and wrote and  
wrote all next day in  
their notebooks, and  
whispered together  
full of excitement,  
and they were sharp-  
spoken with the men  
when they offered to  
ask any questions.

“Then there came  
a day,” said Captain  
Littlepage, leaning  
toward me with a  
strange look in his

eyes, and whispering quickly. "The men all swore they wouldn't stay any longer; the man on watch early in the morning gave the alarm, and they all put off in the boat and got a little way out to sea. Those folks, or whatever they were, come about 'em like bats; all at once they raised incessant armies, and come as

if to drive 'em back  
to sea. They stood  
thick at the edge o'  
the water like the  
ridges o' grim war;  
no thought o' flight,  
none of retreat.

Sometimes a standing  
fight, then soaring on  
main wing tormented  
all the air. And  
when they'd got the  
boat out o' reach o'  
danger, Gaffett said  
they looked back,  
and there was the

town again, standing up just as they'd seen it first, comin' on the coast. Say what you might, they all believed 'twas a kind of waiting-place between this world an' the next."

The captain had sprung to his feet in his excitement, and made excited gestures, but he still whispered huskily.



**"Sit down, sir," I said  
as quietly as I could,  
and he sank into his  
chair quite spent.**

**"Gaffett thought  
the officers were  
hurrying home to  
report and to fit out  
a new expedition  
when they were all  
lost. At the time, the  
men got orders not**

to talk over what they had seen," the old man explained presently in a more natural tone.

"Weren't they all starving, and wasn't it a mirage or something of that sort?" I ventured to ask. But he looked at me blankly.

"Gaffett had got so that his mind ran on nothing else,"

he went on. "The ship's surgeon let fall an opinion to the captain, one day, that 'twas some condition o' the light and the magnetic currents that let them see those folks. 'Twa'n't a right-feeling part of the world, anyway; they had to battle with the compass to make it serve, an' everything seemed to go wrong. Gaffett

had worked it out  
in his own mind  
that they was all  
common ghosts, but  
the conditions were  
unusual favorable for  
seeing them. He was  
always talking about  
the Ge'graphical  
Society, but he never  
took proper steps, as  
I viewed it now, and  
stayed right there at  
the mission. He was  
a good deal crippled,  
and thought they'd

confine him in some jail of a hospital. He said he was waiting to find the right men to tell, somebody bound north. Once in a while they stopped there to leave a mail or something. He was set in his notions, and let two or three proper explorin' expeditions go by him because he didn't like their looks; but when I was there



he had got restless,  
fearin' he might  
be taken away or  
something. He had all  
his directions written  
out straight as a  
string to give the  
right ones. I wanted  
him to trust 'em to  
me, so I might have  
something to show,  
but he wouldn't. I  
suppose he's dead

now. I wrote to him  
an' I done all I could.  
'Twill be a great  
exploit some o' these  
days."

I assented absent-  
mindedly, thinking  
more just then of my  
companion's alert,  
determined look  
and the seafaring,  
ready aspect that  
had come to his face;  
but at this moment  
there fell a sudden

change, and the old, pathetic, scholarly look returned. Behind me hung a map of North America, and I saw, as I turned a little, that his eyes were fixed upon the northernmost regions and their careful recent outlines with a look of bewilderment.

## VII.

### THE OUTER ISLAND

Gaffett with his good bunk and the bird-skins, the story of the wreck of the *Minerva*, the human-shaped creatures of fog and cobweb, the great words of Milton with which he described their onslaught upon the crew, all this moving tale had such an

air of truth that I could not argue with Captain Littlepage. The old man looked away from the map as if it had vaguely troubled him, and regarded me appealingly.

“We were just speaking of”—and he stopped. I saw that he had suddenly forgotten his subject.



**"There were a great many persons at the funeral," I hastened to say.**

**"Oh yes," the captain answered, with satisfaction.**

**"All showed respect who could. The sad circumstances had for a moment slipped my mind. Yes, Mrs. Begg will be very much missed. She was a capital manager for**

her husband when he was at sea. Oh yes, shipping is a very great loss." And he sighed heavily.

"There was hardly a man of any standing who didn't interest himself in some way in navigation. It always gave credit to a town. I call it low-water mark now here in Dunnet."

He rose with dignity to take leave, and asked me to stop at his house some day, when he would show me some outlandish things that he had brought home from sea. I was familiar with the subject of the decadence of shipping interests in all its affecting branches, having been already some

time in Dunnet, and I felt sure that Captain Littlepage's mind had now returned to a safe level.

As we came down the hill toward the village our ways divided, and when I had seen the old captain well started on a smooth piece of sidewalk which would lead him to his own door, we parted,

the best of friends.  
"Step in some  
afternoon," he said,  
as affectionately as  
if I were a fellow-  
shipmaster wrecked  
on the lee shore of  
age like himself. I  
turned toward home,  
and presently met  
Mrs. Todd coming  
toward me with an  
anxious expression.



"I see you sleevin' the old gentleman down the hill," she suggested.

"Yes. I've had a very interesting afternoon with him," I answered, and her face brightened.

"Oh, then he's all right. I was afraid 'twas one o' his flighty spells, an' Mari' Harris wouldn't"—

**"Yes," I returned, smiling, "he has been telling me some old stories, but we talked about Mrs. Begg and the funeral beside, and Paradise Lost."**

**"I expect he got tellin' of you some o' his great narratives," she answered, looking at me shrewdly. "Funerals always sets him goin'. Some o' them**

tales hangs together toler'ble well," she added, with a sharper look than before.

"An' he's been a great reader all his seafarin' days. Some thinks he overdid, and affected his head, but for a man o' his years he's amazin' now when he's at his best.

Oh, he used to be a beautiful man!"

**We were standing where there was a fine view of the harbor and its long stretches of shore all covered by the great army of the pointed firs, darkly cloaked and standing as if they waited to embark. As we looked far seaward among the outer islands,**

the trees seemed to march seaward still, going steadily over the heights and down to the water's edge.

It had been growing gray and cloudy, like the first evening of autumn, and a shadow had fallen on the darkening shore. Suddenly, as we looked, a gleam of golden sunshine struck the outer



islands, and one of them shone out clear in the light, and revealed itself in a compelling way to our eyes. Mrs. Todd was looking off across the bay with a face full of affection and interest. The sunburst upon that outermost island

made it seem like a sudden revelation of the world beyond this which some believe to be so near.

“That’s where mother lives,” said Mrs. Todd. “Can’t we see it plain? I was brought up out there on Green Island. I know every rock an’ bush on it.”

**“Your mother!” I  
exclaimed, with great  
interest.**

**“Yes, dear, cert’in;  
I’ve got her yet,  
old’s I be. She’s one  
of them spry, light-  
footed little women;  
always was, an’  
light-hearted, too,”  
answered Mrs. Todd,  
with satisfaction.**

**“She’s seen all the  
trouble folks can  
see, without it’s her**

last sickness; an'  
she's got a word  
of courage for  
everybody. Life ain't  
spoilt her a mite.  
She's eighty-six an'  
I'm sixty-seven, and  
I've seen the time  
I've felt a good sight  
the oldest. 'Land  
sakes alive!' says  
she, last time I was  
out to see her. 'How  
you do lurch about  
steppin' into a bo't?'  
I laughed so I liked to

have gone right over into the water; an' we pushed off, an' left her laughin' there on the shore."

The light had faded as we watched. Mrs. Todd had mounted a gray rock, and stood there grand and architectural, like a caryatide. Presently she stepped down, and we continued our way homeward.



**“You an’ me, we’ll  
take a bo’t an’  
go out some day  
and see mother,”  
she promised me.**

**“‘Twould please  
her very much, an’  
there’s one or two  
sca’ce herbs grows  
better on the island  
than anywhere else.  
I ain’t seen their like  
nowheres here on the  
main.”**

**“Now I’m goin’ right down to get us each a mug o’ my beer,” she announced as we entered the house, “an’ I believe I’ll sneak in a little mite o’ camomile. Goin’ to the funeral an’ all, I feel to have had a very wearin’ afternoon.”**

**I heard her going down into the cool little cellar, and**

then there was considerable delay. When she returned, mug in hand, I noticed the taste of camomile, in spite of my protest; but its flavor was disguised by some other herb that I did not know, and she stood over me until I drank it all and said that I liked it.

**“I don’t give that to everybody,” said Mrs. Todd kindly; and I felt for a moment as if it were part of a spell and incantation, and as if my enchantress would now begin to look like the cobweb shapes of the arctic town. Nothing happened but a quiet evening and some delightful plans that we made about going**

to Green Island,  
and on the morrow  
there was the clear  
sunshine and blue  
sky of another day.



## VIII. GREEN ISLAND

One morning,  
very early, I heard  
Mrs. Todd in the  
garden outside my  
window. By the  
unusual loudness  
of her remarks to a  
passer-by, and the  
notes of a familiar  
hymn which she  
sang as she worked  
among the herbs,  
and which came as if

directed purposely  
to the sleepy ears of  
my consciousness, I  
knew that she wished  
I would wake up and  
come and speak to  
her.

In a few minutes  
she responded to a  
morning voice from  
behind the blinds.

"I expect you're  
goin' up to your  
schoolhouse to pass

all this pleasant day; yes, I expect you're goin' to be dreadful busy," she said despairingly.

"Perhaps not," said I. "Why, what's going to be the matter with you, Mrs. Todd?" For I supposed that she was tempted by the fine weather to take one of her favorite expeditions along

the shore pastures  
to gather herbs and  
simples, and would  
like to have me keep  
the house.

“No, I don’t want  
to go nowhere by  
land,” she answered  
gayly,—“no, not  
by land; but I don’t  
know’s we shall  
have a better day  
all the rest of the  
summer to go out  
to Green Island an’

see mother. I waked up early thinkin' of her. The wind's light northeast,—'twill take us right straight out, an' this time o' year it's liable to change round southwest an' fetch us home pretty, 'long late in the afternoon. Yes, it's goin' to be a good day."

"Speak to the captain and the Bowden boy,



if you see anybody  
going by toward  
the landing," said I.  
"We'll take the big  
boat."

"Oh, my sakes! now  
you let me do things  
my way," said Mrs.  
Todd scornfully. "No,  
dear, we won't take  
no big bo't. I'll just  
git a handy dory,  
an' Johnny Bowden  
an' me, we'll man  
her ourselves. I

don't want no abler  
bo't than a good  
dory, an' a nice light  
breeze ain't goin'  
to make no sea; an'  
Johnny's my cousin's  
son,—mother'll like  
to have him come;  
an' he'll be down  
to the herrin' weirs  
all the time we're  
there, anyway; we  
don't want to carry  
no men folks havin'  
to be considered  
every minute an'

takin' up all our time.  
No, you let me do;  
we'll just slip out  
an' see mother by  
ourselves. I guess  
what breakfast you'll  
want's about ready  
now."

I had become well  
acquainted with Mrs.  
Todd as landlady,  
herb-gatherer, and  
rustic philosopher;  
we had been discreet  
fellow-passengers

once or twice when I had sailed up the coast to a larger town than Dunnet Landing to do some shopping; but I was yet to become acquainted with her as a mariner. An hour later we pushed off from the landing in the desired dory. The tide was just on the turn, beginning to fall, and several friends and

acquaintances stood along the side of the dilapidated wharf and cheered us by their words and evident interest. Johnny Bowden and I were both rowing in haste to get out where we could catch the breeze and put up the small sail which



lay clumsily furled  
along the gunwale.  
Mrs. Todd sat aft, a  
stern and unbending  
lawgiver.

“You better let her  
drift; we’ll get there  
‘bout as quick; the  
tide’ll take her right  
out from under these  
old buildin’s; there’s  
plenty wind outside.”

“Your bo’t ain’t  
trimmed proper, Mis’  
Todd!” exclaimed a

voice from shore.

“You’re lo’ded so the  
bo’t’ll drag; you can’t  
git her before the  
wind, ma’am. You set  
‘midships, Mis’ Todd,  
an’ let the boy hold  
the sheet ‘n’ steer  
after he gits the sail  
up; you won’t never  
git out to Green  
Island that way. She’s  
lo’ded bad, your bo’t  
is,—she’s heavy  
behind’s she is now!”

Mrs. Todd turned with some difficulty and regarded the anxious adviser, my right oar flew out of water, and we seemed about to capsize. "That you, Asa? Good-mornin'," she said politely. "I al'ays liked the starn seat best. When'd you git back from up country?"

This allusion to Asa's origin was not lost

upon the rest of the company. We were some little distance from shore, but we could hear a chuckle of laughter, and Asa, a person who was too ready with his criticism and advice on every possible subject, turned and walked indignantly away.

When we caught the wind we were

soon on our seaward course, and only stopped to underrun a trawl, for the floats of which Mrs. Todd looked earnestly, explaining that her mother might not be prepared for three extra to dinner; it was her brother's trawl, and she meant to just run her eye along for the right sort of a little haddock. I leaned



over the boat's side with great interest and excitement, while she skillfully handled the long line of hooks, and made scornful remarks upon worthless, bait-consuming creatures of the sea as she reviewed them and left them on the trawl or shook them off into the waves. At last we came to what she pronounced

a proper haddock,  
and having taken him  
on board and ended  
his life resolutely, we  
went our way.

As we sailed along  
I listened to an  
increasingly delightful  
commentary upon  
the islands, some of  
them barren rocks, or  
at best giving sparse  
pasturage for sheep  
in the early summer.  
On one of these an

eager little flock  
ran to the water's  
edge and bleated  
at us so affectingly  
that I would willingly  
have stopped; but  
Mrs. Todd steered  
away from the rocks,  
and scolded at the  
sheep's mean owner,  
an acquaintance of  
hers, who grudged  
the little salt and  
still less care which  
the patient creatures  
needed. The hot

midsummer sun  
makes prisons of  
these small islands  
that are a paradise  
in early June, with  
their cool springs and  
short thick-growing  
grass. On a larger  
island, farther out to  
sea, my entertaining  
companion showed  
me with glee the  
small houses of  
two farmers who  
shared the island  
between them, and

declared that for three generations the people had not spoken to each other even in times of sickness or death or birth. "When the news come that the war was over, one of 'em knew it a week, and never stepped across his wall to tell the other," she said. "There, they enjoy it; they've got to have somethin' to



interest 'em in such  
a place; 'tis a good  
deal more tryin' to  
be tied to folks you  
don't like than 'tis  
to be alone. Each of  
'em tell the neighbors  
their wrongs; plenty  
likes to hear and tell  
again; them as fetch  
a bone'll carry one,  
an' so they keep the  
fight a-goin'. I must  
say I like variety  
myself; some folks

washes Monday an'  
irons Tuesday the  
whole year round,  
even if the circus is  
goin' by!"

A long time before  
we landed at Green  
Island we could see  
the small white  
house, standing  
high like a beacon,  
where Mrs. Todd was  
born and where her  
mother lived, on a  
green slope above

the water, with dark spruce woods still higher. There were crops in the fields, which we presently distinguished from one another. Mrs. Todd examined them while we were still far at sea. "Mother's late potatoes looks backward; ain't had rain enough so far," she pronounced her opinion. "They look weedier than what

they call Front Street down to Cowper Centre. I expect brother William is so occupied with his herrin' weirs an' servin' out bait to the schooners that he don't think once a day of the land."

"What's the flag for, up above the spruces there behind the house?" I inquired, with eagerness.

**“Oh, that’s the sign for herrin’,” she explained kindly, while Johnny Bowden regarded me with contemptuous surprise. “When they get enough for schooners they raise that flag; an’ when ‘tis a poor catch in the weir pocket they just fly a little signal down by the shore, an’ then the small bo’ts comes and get**



enough an' over for  
their trawls. There,  
look! there she is:  
mother sees us; she's  
wavin' somethin'  
out o' the fore door!  
She'll be to the  
landin'-place quick's  
we are."

I looked, and could  
see a tiny flutter in

the doorway, but a quicker signal had made its way from the heart on shore to the heart on the sea.

“How do you suppose she knows it is me?” said Mrs. Todd, with a tender smile on her broad face. “There, you never get over bein’ a child long’s you have a mother to go to. Look at the chimney, now; she’s

gone right in an' brightened up the fire. Well, there, I'm glad mother's well; you'll enjoy seein' her very much."

Mrs. Todd leaned back into her proper position, and the boat trimmed again. She took a firmer grasp of the sheet, and gave an impatient look up at the gaff and the leech of

the little sail, and twitched the sheet as if she urged the wind like a horse. There came at once a fresh gust, and we seemed to have doubled our speed. Soon we were near enough to see a tiny figure with handkerchiefed head come down across the field and stand waiting for us at the cove above a curve of pebble beach.

Presently the dory grated on the pebbles, and Johnny Bowden, who had been kept in abeyance during the voyage, sprang out and used manful exertions to haul us up with the next wave, so that Mrs. Todd could make a dry landing.

“You don that very well,” she said,



mounting to her feet, and coming ashore somewhat stiffly, but with great dignity, refusing our outstretched hands, and returning to possess herself of a bag which had lain at her feet.

**“Well, mother, here I be!” she announced with indifference; but they stood and beamed in each other’s faces.**

**“Lookin’ pretty well for an old lady, ain’t she?” said Mrs. Todd’s mother, turning away from her daughter to speak to me. She was a delightful little person herself, with**

bright eyes and an affectionate air of expectation like a child on a holiday. You felt as if Mrs. Blackett were an old and dear friend before you let go her cordial hand. We all started together up the hill.

“Now don’t you haste too fast, mother,” said Mrs. Todd warningly; “‘tis a far

reach o' risin' ground  
to the fore door, and  
you won't set an' get  
your breath when  
you're once there,  
but go trotting about.  
Now don't you go a  
mite faster than we  
proceed with this bag  
an' basket. Johnny,  
there, 'll fetch up the  
haddock. I just made  
one stop to underrun  
William's trawl till I  
come to jes' such a  
fish's I thought you'd

want to make one o'  
your nice chowders  
of. I've brought an  
onion with me that  
was layin' about on  
the window-sill at  
home."

"That's just what I  
was wantin'," said  
the hostess. "I give a  
sigh when you spoke  
o' chowder, knowin'  
my onions was out.  
William forgot to  
replenish us last



time he was to the Landin'. Don't you haste so yourself Almiry, up this risin' ground. I hear you commencin' to wheeze a'ready."

This mild revenge seemed to afford great pleasure to both giver and receiver. They laughed a little, and looked at each other affectionately, and

then at me. Mrs. Todd considerately paused, and faced about to regard the wide sea view. I was glad to stop, being more out of breath than either of my companions, and I prolonged the halt by asking the names of the neighboring islands. There was a fine breeze blowing,

which we felt more there on the high land than when we were running before it in the dory.

“Why, this ain’t that kitten I saw when I was out last, the one that I said didn’t appear likely?” exclaimed Mrs. Todd as we went our way.

“That’s the one, Almiry,” said her mother. “She always

had a likely look to me, an' she's right after business. I never see such a mouser for one of her age. If't wan't for William, I never should have housed that other dronin' old thing so long; but he sets by her on account of her havin' a bob tail. I don't deem it advisable to maintain cats just on account of their

havin' bob tails;  
they're like all other  
curiosities, good for  
them that wants to  
see 'm twice. This  
kitten catches mice  
for both, an' keeps  
me respectable as  
I ain't been for a  
year. She's a real  
understandin' little  
help, this kitten is.  
I picked her from  
among five Miss  
Augusta Pernell had  
over to Burnt Island,"



said the old woman, trudging along with the kitten close at her skirts. "Augusta, she says to me, 'Why, Mis' Blackett, you've took and homeliest;' and, says I, 'I've got the smartest; I'm satisfied.'"

"I'd trust nobody sooner'n you to pick

out a kitten, mother," said the daughter handsomely, and we went on in peace and harmony.

The house was just before us now, on a green level that looked as if a huge hand had scooped it out of the long green field we had been ascending. A little way above, the dark, spruce woods began

to climb the top of the hill and cover the seaward slopes of the island. There was just room for the small farm and the forest; we looked down at the fish-house and its rough sheds, and the weirs stretching far out into the water.

As we looked upward, the tops of the firs came sharp against the blue sky. There was a great stretch

of rough pasture-land  
round the shoulder  
of the island to  
the eastward, and  
here were all the  
thick-scattered gray  
rocks that kept  
their places, and  
the gray backs of  
many sheep that  
forever wandered  
and fed on the thin  
sweet pasturage  
that fringed the  
ledges and made  
soft hollows and

strips of green turf  
like growing velvet.  
I could see the rich  
green of bayberry  
bushes here and  
there, where the  
rocks made room.  
The air was very  
sweet; one could not  
help wishing to be  
a citizen of such a  
complete and tiny  
continent and home  
of fisherfolk.



The house was broad and clean, with a roof that looked heavy on its low walls. It was one of the houses that seem firm-rooted in the ground, as if they were two-thirds below the surface, like icebergs. The front door stood hospitably open in expectation of company, and an orderly vine grew

at each side; but  
our path led to the  
kitchen door at the  
house-end, and there  
grew a mass of gay  
flowers and greenery,  
as if they had been  
swept together by  
some diligent garden  
broom into a tangled  
heap: there were  
portulacas all along  
under the lower step  
and straggling off  
into the grass, and  
clustering mallows

that crept as near  
as they dared, like  
poor relations. I saw  
the bright eyes and  
brainless little heads  
of two half-grown  
chickens who were  
snuggled down  
among the mallows  
as if they had been  
chased away from  
the door more than  
once, and expected  
to be again.

**"It seems kind o' formal comin' in this way," said Mrs. Todd impulsively, as we passed the flowers and came to the front doorstep; but she was mindful of the proprieties, and walked before us into the best room on the left.**

**"Why, mother, if you haven't gone an' turned the carpet!"**

she exclaimed, with something in her voice that spoke of awe and admiration.

"When'd you get to it? I s'pose Mis' Addicks come over an' helped you, from White Island Landing?"

"No, she didn't," answered the old woman, standing proudly erect, and making the most of



a great moment. "I  
done it all myself  
with William's help.  
He had a spare day,  
an' took right holt  
with me; an' 'twas  
all well beat on the  
grass, an' turned, an'  
put down again afore  
we went to bed. I  
ripped an' sewed over  
two o' them long  
breadths. I ain't had  
such a good night's  
sleep for two years."

**“There, what do you think o’ havin’ such a mother as that for eighty-six year old?” said Mrs. Todd, standing before us like a large figure of Victory.**

**As for the mother, she took on a sudden look of youth; you felt as if she**

promised a great future, and was beginning, not ending, her summers and their happy toils.

“My, my!” exclaimed Mrs. Todd. “I couldn’t ha’ done it myself, I’ve got to own it.”

“I was much pleased to have it off my mind,” said Mrs. Blackett, humbly; “the more so because along at the first

of the next week I wasn't very well. I suppose it may have been the change of weather."

Mrs. Todd could not resist a significant glance at me, but, with charming sympathy, she forbore to point the lesson or to connect this illness with its apparent cause. She loomed larger than

ever in the little old-fashioned best room, with its few pieces of good furniture and pictures of national interest. The green paper curtains were stamped with conventional landscapes of a foreign order,—castles on inaccessible crags, and lovely lakes with steep wooded shores; under-foot the



treasured carpet was covered thick with home-made rugs.

There were empty glass lamps and crystallized bouquets of grass and some fine shells on the narrow mantelpiece.

"I was married in this room," said Mrs. Todd unexpectedly; and I heard her give a sigh after she had spoken, as if she

could not help the touch of regret that would forever come with all her thoughts of happiness.

“We stood right there between the windows,” she added, “and the minister stood here. William wouldn’t come in. He was always odd about

seein' folks, just's he is now. I run to meet 'em from a child, an' William, he'd take an' run away."

"I've been the gainer," said the old mother cheerfully.

"William has been son an' daughter both since you was married off the island. He's been

**'most too satisfied to stop at home 'long o' his old mother, but I always tell 'em I'm the gainer."**

**We were all moving toward the kitchen as if by common instinct. The best room was too suggestive of serious occasions, and the shades were all pulled down to shut out the summer light**

and air. It was indeed a tribute to Society to find a room set apart for her behests out there on so apparently neighborless and remote an island. Afternoon visits and evening festivals must be few in such a bleak situation at certain seasons of the year, but Mrs. Blackett was of those who do not



live to themselves,  
and who have long  
since passed the line  
that divides mere  
self-concern from  
a valued share in  
whatever Society  
can give and take.  
There were those of  
her neighbors who  
never had taken the  
trouble to furnish a  
best room, but Mrs.  
Blackett was one who  
knew the uses of a  
parlor.

**“Yes, do come right out into the old kitchen; I shan’t make any stranger of you,” she invited us pleasantly, after we had been properly received in the room appointed to formality. “I expect Almiry, here, ‘ll be driftin’ out ‘mongst the pasture-weeds quick’s she can find a good excuse. ‘Tis hot now. You’d better**

content yourselves  
till you get nice an'  
rested, an' 'long after  
dinner the sea-breeze  
'll spring up, an' then  
you can take your  
walks, an' go up an'  
see the prospect  
from the big ledge.  
Almiry'll want to  
show off everything  
there is. Then I'll get  
you a good cup o' tea  
before you start to  
go home. The days  
are plenty long now."

While we were talking in the best room the selected fish had been mysteriously brought up from the shore, and lay all cleaned and ready in an earthen crock on the table.

"I think William might have just stopped an' said a word," remarked Mrs. Todd, pouting with high

affront as she caught sight of it. "He's friendly enough when he comes ashore, an' was remarkable social the last time, for him."

"He ain't disposed to be very social with the ladies," explained William's mother, with a delightful glance at me, as if she counted upon my friendship and tolerance. "He's



very particular, and he's all in his old fishin'-clothes to-day. He'll want me to tell him everything you said and done, after you've gone. William has very deep affections. He'll want to see you, Almiry. Yes, I guess he'll be in by an' by."

"I'll search for him by 'n' by, if he don't," proclaimed

Mrs. Todd, with an air of unalterable resolution. "I know all of his burrows down 'long the shore. I'll catch him by hand 'fore he knows it. I've got some business with William, anyway. I brought forty-two cents with me that was due him for them last lobsters he brought in."

**“You can leave it  
with me,” suggested  
the little old mother,  
who was already  
stepping about  
among her pots and  
pans in the pantry,  
and preparing to  
make the chowder.**

**I became possessed  
of a sudden  
unwonted curiosity  
in regard to William,  
and felt that half**

**the pleasure of  
my visit would be  
lost if I could not  
make his interesting  
acquaintance.**

## IX.

### WILLIAM

Mrs. Todd had taken the onion out of her basket and laid it down upon the kitchen table. "There's Johnny Bowden come with us, you know," she reminded her mother. "He'll be hungry enough to eat his size."



**“I’ve got new  
doughnuts, dear,”  
said the little old  
lady. “You don’t  
often catch William  
‘n’ me out o’  
provisions. I expect  
you might have chose  
a somewhat larger  
fish, but I’ll try an’  
make it do. I shall  
have to have a few  
extra potatoes, but  
there’s a field full  
out there, an’ the  
hoe’s leanin’ against**

the well-house,  
in 'mongst the  
climbin'-beans." She  
smiled and gave  
her daughter a  
commanding nod.

"Land sakes alive!  
Le's blow the horn  
for William," insisted  
Mrs. Todd, with  
some excitement.

"He needn't break  
his spirit so far's to  
come in. He'll know  
you need him for

something particular,  
an' then we can call  
to him as he comes  
up the path. I won't  
put him to no pain."

Mrs. Blackett's old  
face, for the first  
time, wore a look  
of trouble, and I  
found it necessary  
to counteract  
the teasing spirit  
of Almira. It was  
too pleasant  
to stay indoors

altogether, even  
in such rewarding  
companionship;  
besides, I might meet  
William; and, straying  
out presently, I  
found the hoe by the  
well-house and an  
old splint basket at  
the woodshed door,  
and also found my  
way down to the field  
where there was a  
great square patch  
of rough, weedy  
potato-tops and tall

ragweed. One corner was already dug, and I chose a fat-looking hill where the tops were well withered. There is all the pleasure that one can have in gold-digging in finding one's hopes satisfied in the riches of a good hill of potatoes. I longed to go on; but it did not seem frugal to dig any longer after my basket was full, and



at last I took my hoe  
by the middle and  
lifted the basket to  
go back up the hill.  
I was sure that Mrs.  
Blackett must be  
waiting impatiently  
to slice the potatoes  
into the chowder,  
layer after layer, with  
the fish.

**"You let me take  
holt o' that basket,  
ma'am," said the  
pleasant, anxious  
voice behind me.**

**I turned, startled in  
the silence of the  
wide field, and saw  
an elderly man, bent  
in the shoulders  
as fishermen often  
are, gray-headed  
and clean-shaven,  
and with a timid air.  
It was William. He**

looked just like his mother, and I had been imagining that he was large and stout like his sister, Almira Todd; and, strange to say, my fancy had led me to picture him not far from thirty and a little loutish. It was necessary instead to pay William the respect due to age.

I accustomed myself to plain facts on the instant, and we said good-morning like old friends. The basket was really heavy, and I put the hoe through its handle and offered him one end; then we moved easily toward the house together, speaking of the fine weather and of mackerel which were reported to be striking in all about

the bay. William had been out since three o'clock, and had taken an extra fare of fish. I could feel that Mrs. Todd's eyes were upon us as we approached the house, and although I fell behind in the narrow path, and let William take the basket alone and



precede me at some little distance the rest of the way, I could plainly hear her greet him.

“Got round to comin’ in, didn’t you?” she inquired, with amusement. “Well, now, that’s clever. Didn’t know’s I should see you to-day, William, an’ I wanted to settle an account.”

I felt somewhat disturbed and responsible, but when I joined them they were on most simple and friendly terms. It became evident that, with William, it was the first step that cost, and that, having once joined in social interests, he was able to pursue them with more or less pleasure. He was about sixty, and not

young-looking for his years, yet so undying is the spirit of youth, and bashfulness has such a power of survival, that I felt all the time as if one must try to make the occasion easy for some one who was young and new to the affairs of social life. He asked politely if I would like to go up to the great ledge while dinner was

getting ready; so, not without a deep sense of pleasure, and a delighted look of surprise from the two hostesses, we started, William and I, as if both of us felt much younger than we looked. Such was the innocence and simplicity of the moment that when I heard Mrs. Todd laughing behind us in the kitchen

I laughed too, but William did not even blush. I think he was a little deaf, and he stepped along before me most businesslike and intent upon his errand.

We went from the upper edge of the field above the house into a smooth, brown path among the dark spruces. The hot sun brought out the



fragrance of the pitchy bark, and the shade was pleasant as we climbed the hill. William stopped once or twice to show me a great wasps'-nest close by, or some fishhawks'-nests below in a bit of swamp. He picked a few sprigs of late-blooming linnaea as we came out upon an open bit of pasture at the top of the

island, and gave them to me without speaking, but he knew as well as I that one could not say half he wished about linnaea. Through this piece of rough pasture ran a huge shape of stone like the great backbone of an enormous creature. At the end, near the woods, we could climb up on it and walk along to the

highest point; there above the circle of pointed firs we could look down over all the island, and could see the ocean that circled this and a hundred other bits of island ground, the mainland shore and all the far horizons. It gave a sudden sense of space, for nothing stopped the eye or

hedged one in,—that sense of liberty in space and time which great prospects always give.

“There ain’t no such view in the world, I expect,” said William proudly, and I hastened to speak my heartfelt tribute of praise; it was impossible not to feel

as if an untraveled  
boy had spoken, and  
yet one loved to  
have him value his  
native heath.



## X. WHERE PENNYROYAL GREW

We were a little late to dinner, but Mrs. Blakett and Mrs. Todd were lenient, and we all took our places after William had paused to wash his hands, like a pious Brahmin, at the well, and put on a neat blue coat which he took from

a peg behind the kitchen door. Then he resolutely asked a blessing in words that I could not hear, and we ate the chowder and were thankful. The kitten went round and round the table, quite erect, and, holding on by her fierce young claws, she stopped to mew with pathos at each elbow, or darted off to the open door

when a song sparrow forgot himself and lit in the grass too near. William did not talk much, but his sister Todd occupied the time and told all the news there was to tell of Dunnet Landing and its coasts, while the old mother listened with delight. Her hospitality was something exquisite; she had the gift

which so many women lack, of being able to make themselves and their houses belong entirely to a guest's pleasure,—that charming surrender for the moment of themselves and whatever belongs to them, so that they make a part of one's own life that can never be forgotten. Tact is after all a

kind of mindreading,  
and my hostess  
held the golden  
gift. Sympathy is of  
the mind as well as  
the heart, and Mrs.  
Blackett's world and  
mine were one from  
the moment we met.  
Besides, she had that  
final, that highest gift  
of heaven, a perfect  
self-forgetfulness.  
Sometimes, as I  
watched her eager,  
sweet old face,



I wondered why she had been set to shine on this lonely island of the northern coast. It must have been to keep the balance true, and make up to all her scattered and depending neighbors for other things which they may have lacked.

When we had finished clearing away the old

blue plates, and the kitten had taken care of her share of the fresh haddock, just as we were putting back the kitchen chairs in their places, Mrs. Todd said briskly that she must go up into the pasture now to gather the desired herbs.

“You can stop here an’ rest, or you can accompany me,” she

announced. "Mother ought to have her nap, and when we come back she an' William'll sing for you. She admires music," said Mrs. Todd, turning to speak to her mother.

But Mrs. Blackett tried to say that she couldn't sing as she used, and perhaps William wouldn't feel like it. She looked

tired, the good old soul, or I should have liked to sit in the peaceful little house while she slept; I had had much pleasant experience of pastures already in her daughter's company. But it seemed best to go with Mrs. Todd, and off we went.

Mrs. Todd carried the gingham bag which

she had brought from home, and a small heavy burden in the bottom made it hang straight and slender from her hand. The way was steep, and she soon grew breathless, so that we sat down to rest awhile on a convenient large stone among the bayberry.



**“There, I wanted you to see this,—’tis mother’s picture,” said Mrs. Todd; “’twas taken once when she was up to Portland soon after she was married. That’s me,” she added, opening another worn case, and displaying the full face of the cheerful child she looked like still in spite of being past sixty. “And here’s**

William an' father  
together. I take after  
father, large and  
heavy, an' William is  
like mother's folks,  
short an' thin. He  
ought to have made  
something o' himself,  
bein' a man an' so  
like mother; but  
though he's been  
very steady to work,  
an' kept up the farm,  
an' done his fishin'  
too right along, he  
never had mother's

snap an' power o'  
seein' things just  
as they be. He's got  
excellent judgment,  
too," meditated  
William's sister, but  
she could not arrive  
at any satisfactory  
decision upon what  
she evidently thought  
his failure in life. "I  
think it is well to see  
any one so happy  
an' makin' the most  
of life just as it falls  
to hand," she said

as she began to put the daguerreotypes away again; but I reached out my hand to see her mother's once more, a most flowerlike face of a lovely young woman in quaint dress. There was in the eyes a look of anticipation and joy, a far-off look that sought the horizon; one often sees it in seafaring families,

inherited by girls  
and boys alike from  
men who spend their  
lives at sea, and are  
always watching for  
distant sails or the  
first loom of the  
land. At sea there is  
nothing to be seen  
close by, and this has  
its counterpart in a  
sailor's character, in  
the large and brave  
and patient traits



that are developed,  
the hopeful  
pleasantness that  
one loves so in a  
seafarer.

When the family  
pictures were  
wrapped again in a  
big handkerchief,  
we set forward in a  
narrow footpath and  
made our way to a  
lonely place that  
faced northward,  
where there was

more pasturage and fewer bushes, and we went down to the edge of short grass above some rocky cliffs where the deep sea broke with a great noise, though the wind was down and the water looked quiet a little way from shore. Among the grass grew such pennyroyal as the rest of the world could not provide.

There was a fine fragrance in the air as we gathered it sprig by sprig and stepped along carefully, and Mrs. Todd pressed her aromatic nosegay between her hands and offered it to me again and again.

“There’s nothin’ like it,” she said; “oh no, there’s no such pennyr’yal as

this in the state of  
Maine. It's the right  
pattern of the plant,  
and all the rest I  
ever see is but an  
imitation. Don't it  
do you good?" And  
I answered with  
enthusiasm.

"There, dear, I never  
showed nobody else  
but mother where to  
find this place; 'tis  
kind of sainted to me.  
Nathan, my husband,

an' I used to love this place when we was courtin', and"—she hesitated, and then spoke softly—"when he was lost, 'twas just off shore tryin' to get in by the short channel out there between Squaw Islands, right in sight o' this headland where we'd set an' made our plans all summer long."



I had never heard her speak of her husband before, but I felt that we were friends now since she had brought me to this place.

“‘Twas but a dream with us,” Mrs. Todd said. “I knew it when he was gone. I knew it”—and she whispered as if she were at confession—“I knew it afore he started to

go to sea. My heart  
was gone out o' my  
keepin' before I ever  
saw Nathan; but he  
loved me well, and he  
made me real happy,  
and he died before he  
ever knew what he'd  
had to know if we'd  
lived long together.  
'Tis very strange  
about love. No,  
Nathan never found  
out, but my heart  
was troubled when  
I knew him first.

There's more women likes to be loved than there is of those that loves. I spent some happy hours right here. I always liked Nathan, and he never knew. But this pennyr'yal always reminded me, as I'd sit and gather it and hear him talkin'—it always would remind me of—the other one."

She looked away  
from me, and  
presently rose  
and went on by  
herself. There was  
something lonely and  
solitary about her  
great determined  
shape. She might  
have been Antigone  
alone on the Theban  
plain. It is not often  
given in a noisy  
world to come to  
the places of great  
grief and silence.

An absolute, archaic grief possessed this countrywoman; she seemed like a renewal of some historic soul, with her sorrows and the remoteness of a daily life busied with rustic simplicities and the scents of primeval herbs.

I was not incompetent at herb-gathering, and after



a while, when I had  
sat long enough  
waking myself to  
new thoughts, and  
reading a page  
of remembrance  
with new pleasure,  
I gathered some  
bunches, as I was  
bound to do, and  
at last we met  
again higher up the  
shore, in the plain  
every-day world we  
had left behind when  
we went down to the

penny-royal plot. As we walked together along the high edge of the field we saw a hundred sails about the bay and farther seaward; it was mid-afternoon or after, and the day was coming to an end.

“Yes, they’re all makin’ towards the shore,—the small craft an’ the lobster smacks an’ all,” said

my companion. "We must spend a little time with mother now, just to have our tea, an' then put for home."

"No matter if we lose the wind at sundown; I can row in with Johnny," said I; and Mrs. Todd nodded reassuringly and kept to her steady plod, not quickening her gait even when we

saw William come round the corner of the house as if to look for us, and wave his hand and disappear.

“Why, William’s right on deck; I didn’t know’s we should see any more of him!” exclaimed Mrs. Todd. “Now mother’ll put the kettle right on; she’s got a good fire goin’.” I too could

see the blue smoke thicken, and then we both walked a little faster, while Mrs. Todd groped in her full bag of herbs to find the daguerreotypes and be ready to put them in their places.



## XI.

### THE OLD SINGERS

William was sitting on the side door step, and the old mother was busy making her tea; she gave into my hand an old flowered-glass tea-caddy.

“William thought you’d like to see this, when he was settin’ the table. My father brought it to my mother

from the island of Tobago; an' here's a pair of beautiful mugs that came with it." She opened the glass door of a little cupboard beside the chimney. "These I call my best things, dear," she said. "You'd laugh to see how we enjoy 'em Sunday nights in winter: we have a real company tea 'stead o' livin' right

along just the same,  
an' I make somethin'  
good for a s'prise an'  
put on some o' my  
preserves, an' we get  
a'talkin' together an'  
have real pleasant  
times."

Mrs. Todd laughed  
indulgently, and  
looked to see what  
I thought of such  
childishness.

**“I wish I could be here some Sunday evening,” said I.**

**“William an’ me’ll be talkin’ about you an’ thinkin’ o’ this nice day,” said Mrs. Blackett affectionately, and she glanced at William, and he looked up bravely and nodded. I began**

to discover that he and his sister could not speak their deeper feelings before each other.

“Now I want you an’ mother to sing,” said Mrs. Todd abruptly, with an air of command, and I gave William much sympathy in his evident distress.

“After I’ve had my cup o’ tea, dear,”



answered the old  
hostess cheerfully;  
and so we sat down  
and took our cups  
and made merry  
while they lasted. It  
was impossible not  
to wish to stay on  
forever at Green  
Island, and I could  
not help saying so.

“I’m very happy  
here, both winter  
an’ summer,” said  
old Mrs. Blackett.

**“William an’ I never wish for any other home, do we, William? I’m glad you find it pleasant; I wish you’d come an’ stay, dear, whenever you feel inclined. But here’s Almiry; I always think Providence was kind to plot an’ have her husband leave her a good house where she really belonged. She’d been very restless if she’d had**

to continue here  
on Green Island.  
You wanted more  
scope, didn't you,  
Almiry, an' to live in  
a large place where  
more things grew?  
Sometimes folks  
wonders that we  
don't live together;  
perhaps we shall  
some time," and a  
shadow of sadness  
and apprehension  
flitted across her  
face. "The time o'

sickness an' failin' has got to come to all. But Almiry's got an herb that's good for everything." She smiled as she spoke, and looked bright again.

"There's some herb that's good for everybody, except for them that thinks they're sick when they ain't," announced Mrs.

Todd, with a truly professional air of finality. "Come, William, let's have Sweet Home, an' then mother'll sing Cupid an' the Bee for us."

Then followed a most charming surprise. William mastered his timidity and began to sing. His voice was a little faint and frail, like the family



daguerreotypes, but it was a tenor voice, and perfectly true and sweet. I have never heard Home, Sweet Home sung as touchingly and seriously as he sang it; he seemed to make it quite new; and when he paused for a moment at the end of the first line and began the next, the old mother joined him and they

sang together, she missing only the higher notes, where he seemed to lend his voice to hers for the moment and carry on her very note and air. It was the silent man's real and only means of expression, and one could have listened forever, and have asked for more and more songs of old Scotch and English

inheritance and the best that have lived from the ballad music of the war. Mrs. Todd kept time visibly, and sometimes audibly, with her ample foot. I saw the tears in her eyes sometimes, when I could see beyond the tears in mine. But at last the

songs ended and the time came to say good-bye; it was the end of a great pleasure.

Mrs. Blackett, the dear old lady, opened the door of her bedroom while Mrs. Todd was tying up the herb bag, and William had gone down to get the boat ready and to blow

the horn for Johnny Bowden, who had joined a roving boat party who were off the shore lobstering.

I went to the door of the bedroom, and thought how pleasant it looked, with its pink-and-white patchwork quilt and the brown unpainted paneling of its woodwork.



**“Come right in, dear,” she said. “I want you to set down in my old quilted rockin’-chair there by the window; you’ll say it’s the prettiest view in the house. I set there a good deal to rest me and when I want to read.”**

**There was a worn red Bible on the lightstand, and Mrs. Blackett’s heavy**

silver-bowed glasses;  
her thimble was on  
the narrow window-  
ledge, and folded  
carefully on the  
table was a thick  
striped-cotton shirt  
that she was making  
for her son. Those  
dear old fingers and  
their loving stitches,  
that heart which  
had made the most  
of everything that  
needed love! Here  
was the real home,

the heart of the  
old house on Green  
Island! I sat in the  
rocking-chair, and  
felt that it was a  
place of peace, the  
little brown bedroom,  
and the quiet outlook  
upon field and sea  
and sky.

I looked up, and  
we understood  
each other without  
speaking. "I shall  
like to think o' your

settin' here to-day,"  
said Mrs. Blackett.

"I want you to come  
again. It has been so  
pleasant for William."

The wind served us  
all the way home,  
and did not fall or  
let the sail slacken  
until we were close  
to the shore. We had  
a generous freight of  
lobsters in the boat,  
and new potatoes  
which William had

put aboard, and what Mrs. Todd proudly called a full "kag" of prime number one salted mackerel; and when we landed we had to make business arrangements to have these conveyed to her house in a wheelbarrow.

I never shall forget the day at Green Island. The town of Dunnet Landing



seemed large and  
noisy and oppressive  
as we came ashore.  
Such is the power  
of contrast; for the  
village was so still  
that I could hear the  
shy whippoorwills  
singing that night  
as I lay awake in my  
downstairs bedroom,  
and the scent of Mrs.  
Todd's herb garden

**under the window  
blew in again and  
again with every  
gentle rising of the  
seabreeze.**

## XII.

### A STRANGE SAIL

Except for a few stray guests, islanders or from the inland country, to whom Mrs. Todd offered the hospitalities of a single meal, we were quite by ourselves all summer; and when there were signs of invasion, late in July, and a certain Mrs.

Fosdick appeared like a strange sail on the far horizon, I suffered much from apprehension. I had been living in the quaint little house with as much comfort and unconsciousness as if it were a larger body, or a double shell, in whose simple convolutions Mrs. Todd and I had secreted ourselves, until some wandering

hermit crab of a visitor marked the little spare room for her own. Perhaps now and then a castaway on a lonely desert island dreads the thought of being rescued. I heard of Mrs. Fosdick for the first time with a selfish sense of objection; but after all, I was still vacation-tenant of the schoolhouse,



where I could always be alone, and it was impossible not to sympathize with Mrs. Todd, who, in spite of some preliminary grumbling, was really delighted with the prospect of entertaining an old friend.

For nearly a month we received occasional news of Mrs. Fosdick, who

seemed to be making a royal progress from house to house in the inland neighborhood, after the fashion of Queen Elizabeth. One Sunday after another came and went, disappointing Mrs. Todd in the hope of seeing her guest at church and fixing the day for the great visit to begin; but Mrs. Fosdick was not ready to

commit herself to a date. An assurance of "some time this week" was not sufficiently definite from a free-footed housekeeper's point of view, and Mrs. Todd put aside all herb-gathering plans, and went through the various stages of expectation, provocation, and despair. At last she was ready to

believe that Mrs. Fosdick must have forgotten her promise and returned to her home, which was vaguely said to be over Thomaston way. But one evening, just as the supper-table was cleared and "readied up," and Mrs. Todd had put her large apron over her head and stepped forth for an evening stroll in the garden,

the unexpected happened. She heard the sound of wheels, and gave an excited cry to me, as I sat by the window, that Mrs. Fosdick was coming right up the street.

“She may not be considerate, but she’s dreadful good company,” said Mrs. Todd hastily, coming back a few steps from the



neighborhood of the gate. "No, she ain't a mite considerate, but there's a small lobster left over from your tea; yes, it's a real mercy there's a lobster. Susan Fosdick might just as well have passed the compliment o' comin' an hour ago."

"Perhaps she has had her supper,"  
I ventured to

suggest, sharing the housekeeper's anxiety, and meekly conscious of an inconsiderate appetite for my own supper after a long expedition up the bay. There were so few emergencies of any sort at Dunnet Landing that this one appeared overwhelming.

**“No, she’s rode ‘way  
over from Nahum  
Brayton’s place. I  
expect they were  
busy on the farm,  
and couldn’t spare  
the horse in proper  
season. You just  
sly out an’ set the  
teakittle on again,  
dear, an’ drop in a  
good han’ful o’ chips;  
the fire’s all alive.  
I’ll take her right up  
to lay off her things,  
as she’ll be occupied**

with explanations an' gettin' her bunnit off, so you'll have plenty o' time. She's one I shouldn't like to have find me unprepared."

Mrs. Fosdick was already at the gate, and Mrs. Todd now turned with an air of complete surprise and delight to welcome her.

"Why, Susan Fosdick," I heard

her exclaim in a fine unhindered voice, as if she were calling across a field, "I come near giving of you up! I was afraid you'd gone an' 'portioned out my visit to somebody else. I s'pose you've been to supper?"

"Lor', no, I ain't, Almiry Todd," said Mrs. Fosdick cheerfully, as she



turned, laden with  
bags and bundles,  
from making her  
adieux to the boy  
driver. "I ain't had a  
mite o' supper, dear.  
I've been lottin' all  
the way on a cup  
o' that best tea o'  
yourn,—some o' that  
Oolong you keep  
in the little chist. I  
don't want none o'  
your useful herbs."

**"I keep that tea for ministers' folks,"  
gayly responded  
Mrs. Todd. "Come  
right along in, Susan  
Fosdick. I declare if  
you ain't the same  
old sixpence!"**

**As they came up  
the walk together,  
laughing like girls,  
I fled, full of cares,  
to the kitchen, to  
brighten the fire  
and be sure that**

the lobster, sole dependence of a late supper, was well out of reach of the cat. There proved to be fine reserves of wild raspberries and bread and butter, so that I regained my composure, and waited impatiently for my own share of this illustrious visit to begin. There was an instant sense of high festivity in the

evening air from the moment when our guest had so frankly demanded the Oolong tea.

The great moment arrived. I was formally presented at the stair-foot, and the two friends passed on to the kitchen, where I soon heard a hospitable clink of crockery and the brisk stirring

of a tea-cup. I sat in my high-backed rocking-chair by the window in the front room with an unreasonable feeling of being left out, like the child who stood at the gate in Hans Andersen's story. Mrs. Fosdick did not look, at first sight, like a person of great social gifts. She was a serious-looking little bit of



an old woman, with a birdlike nod of the head. I had often been told that she was the "best hand in the world to make a visit,"—as if to visit were the highest of vocations; that everybody wished for her, while few could get her; and I saw that Mrs. Todd felt a comfortable sense of distinction in being favored

with the company of this eminent person who "knew just how." It was certainly true that Mrs. Fosdick gave both her hostess and me a warm feeling of enjoyment and expectation, as if she had the power of social suggestion to all neighboring minds.

The two friends did not reappear for

at least an hour. I could hear their busy voices, loud and low by turns, as they ranged from public to confidential topics. At last Mrs. Todd kindly remembered me and returned, giving my door a ceremonious knock before she stepped in, with the small visitor in her wake. She reached behind her and took

**Mrs. Fosdick's hand  
as if she were young  
and bashful, and  
gave her a gentle  
pull forward.**

**"There, I don't know  
whether you're goin'  
to take to each other  
or not; no, nobody  
can't tell whether  
you'll suit each other,  
but I expect you'll  
get along some way,  
both having seen  
the world," said**

our affectionate  
hostess. "You can  
inform Mis' Fosdick  
how we found the  
folks out to Green  
Island the other day.  
She's always been  
well acquainted with  
mother. I'll slip out  
now an' put away the  
supper things an' set  
my bread to rise, if  
you'll both excuse  
me. You can come  
an' keep me company



when you get ready, either or both." And Mrs. Todd, large and amiable, disappeared and left us.

Being furnished not only with a subject of conversation, but with a safe refuge in the kitchen in case of incompatibility, Mrs. Fosdick and I sat down, prepared to make the best of each other. I soon

discovered that she, like many of the elder women of the coast, had spent a part of her life at sea, and was full of a good traveler's curiosity and enlightenment. By the time we thought it discreet to join our hostess we were already sincere friends.

You may speak of a visit's setting in as well as a tide's, and it was impossible, as Mrs. Todd whispered to me, not to be pleased at the way this visit was setting in; a new impulse and refreshing of the social currents and seldom visited bays of memory appeared to have begun. Mrs. Fosdick had been the mother of a large

family of sons and daughters,—sailors and sailors' wives,—and most of them had died before her. I soon grew more or less acquainted with the histories of all their fortunes and misfortunes, and subjects of an intimate nature were no more withheld from my ears than if I had been a shell on the mantelpiece.

Mrs. Fosdick was not without a touch of dignity and elegance; she was fashionable in her dress, but it was a curiously well-preserved provincial fashion of some years back. In a wider sphere one might have called her a woman of the world, with her unexpected bits of modern knowledge, but



**Mrs. Todd's wisdom was an intimation of truth itself. She might belong to any age, like an idyl of Theocritus; but while she always understood Mrs. Fosdick, that entertaining pilgrim could not always understand Mrs. Todd.**

**That very first evening my friends**

plunged into a  
borderless sea of  
reminiscences and  
personal news. Mrs.  
Fosdick had been  
staying with a family  
who owned the farm  
where she was born,  
and she had visited  
every sunny knoll  
and shady field  
corner; but when she  
said that it might be  
for the last time, I

detected in her tone something expectant of the contradiction which Mrs. Todd promptly offered.

“Almiry,” said Mrs. Fosdick, with sadness, “you may say what you like, but I am one of nine brothers and sisters brought up on the old place, and we’re all dead but me.”

**“Your sister Dailey ain’t gone, is she? Why, no, Louisa ain’t gone!” exclaimed Mrs. Todd, with surprise. “Why, I never heard of that occurrence!”**

**“Yes’m; she passed away last October, in Lynn. She had made her distant home in Vermont State, but she was making a visit to her youngest**

daughter. Louisa was the only one of my family whose funeral I wasn't able to attend, but 'twas a mere accident. All the rest of us were settled right about home. I thought it was very slack of 'em in Lynn not to fetch her to the old place; but when I came to hear about it, I learned that they'd recently put



up a very elegant monument, and my sister Dailey was always great for show. She'd just been out to see the monument the week before she was taken down, and admired it so much that they felt sure of her wishes."

"So she's really gone, and the funeral was up to Lynn!"

repeated Mrs. Todd,  
as if to impress the  
sad fact upon her  
mind. "She was some  
years younger than  
we be, too. I recollect  
the first day she ever  
came to school; 'twas  
that first year mother  
sent me inshore  
to stay with aunt  
Topham's folks and  
get my schooling. You  
fetched little Louisa  
to school one Monday  
mornin' in a pink

dress an' her long curls, and she set between you an' me, and got cryin' after a while, so the teacher sent us home with her at recess."

"She was scared of seeing so many children about her; there was only her and me and brother John at home then; the older boys were to sea with

father, an' the rest of us wa'n't born," explained Mrs. Fosdick. "That next fall we all went to sea together. Mother was uncertain till the last minute, as one may say. The ship was waiting orders, but the baby that then was, was born just in time, and there was a long spell of extra bad weather, so mother got about

again before they  
had to sail, an' we all  
went. I remember my  
clothes were all left  
ashore in the east  
chamber in a basket  
where mother'd took  
them out o' my chist  
o' drawers an' left  
'em ready to carry  
aboard. She didn't  
have nothing aboard,  
of her own, that she  
wanted to cut up  
for me, so when my  
dress wore out she



just put me into a spare suit o' John's, jacket and trousers. I wasn't but eight years old an' he was most seven and large of his age. Quick as we made a port she went right ashore an' fitted me out pretty, but we was bound for the East Indies and didn't put in anywhere for a good while. So I had quite a spell o' freedom.

**Mother made my new skirt long because I was growing, and I poked about the deck after that, real discouraged, feeling the hem at my heels every minute, and as if youth was past and gone. I liked the trousers best; I used to climb the riggin'**

with 'em and frighten  
mother till she said  
an' vowed she'd  
never take me to sea  
again."

I thought by the  
polite absent-minded  
smile on Mrs. Todd's  
face this was no new  
story.

"Little Louisa was a  
beautiful child; yes, I  
always thought Louisa  
was very pretty,"  
Mrs. Todd said. "She

was a dear little girl in those days. She favored your mother; the rest of you took after your father's folks."

"We did certain," agreed Mrs. Fosdick, rocking steadily.

"There, it does seem so pleasant to talk with an old acquaintance that knows what you know. I see so many

of these new folks  
nowadays, that seem  
to have neither  
past nor future.  
Conversation's got to  
have some root in the  
past, or else you've  
got to explain every  
remark you make,  
an' it wears a person  
out."

Mrs. Todd gave a  
funny little laugh.  
"Yes'm, old friends is  
always best, 'less you



can catch a new one that's fit to make an old one out of," she said, and we gave an affectionate glance at each other which Mrs. Fosdick could not have understood, being the latest comer to the house.

**PART TWO  
CONCLUDES WITH  
CHAPTERS 13-21**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sarah Orne Jewett was born in South Berwick, Maine in 1849. In her childhood she walked all over Maine, as treatment for her rheumatoid arthritis and with her father, a traveling doctor. She achieved literary recognition at 19, eventually becoming one of the most**

**famous writers of  
her time. She spent  
much of her life in  
Boston and traveling  
in Europe with her  
friend, Annie Adams  
Fields. A carriage  
accident in 1902  
ended her writing  
career and seven  
years later she would  
die of a stroke in  
her family home  
overlooking Central  
Square in South  
Berwick, Maine.**

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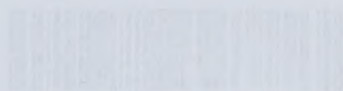








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